



Riverside Public Library

Veteran's History Project

Interview with:

Arthur Bruce Colbert
Colonel, United States Marine Corps (Retired)
Marine Squadron Helicopter 1
(Presidential Helicopter Squadron)
Served during Cold War, Vietnamese Conflict

1 February 2003

Also Present: Richard L. Savage

Taped at the Riverside Public Library, downtown branch

I was born in 1931 in a town called Chester, Illinois located right on the banks of the Mississippi River. Of course that was at the beginning of the Depression and I don't remember too much about the Depression. My dad owned a filling station which today is called a garage. We never had a lot of money, but we never wanted for anything. I had an unremarkable childhood. I spent a lot of time in the woods because large woods were right across the street from our house.

Anyway in the fall of my senior year in high school I was out walking around one day between classes and I noticed this bulletin on the bulletin board that talked about the Naval ROTC Program. I went to the principal and asked about it. He said he didn't know anything about it but he would check up on it. He kept his word and eventually I ended up going over to Columbia, Missouri and taking a two-day, sixteen-hour exam for the ROTC Program. I was accepted for that and I ended up going to the University of Missouri at Columbia. I had wanted to go there in the first place. We had to take military subjects, algebra, physics, chemistry, and I didn't have an easy time.

My freshman cruise, which was the summer of 1950, I was on the *USS St. Paul*, a heavy cruiser, CA-73, and we were halfway between San Francisco and Pearl Harbor when the Korean War broke out. Of course, all the ship's company told all of us mid-shipmen we were going right straight to Korea, but they did that just to pull our leg. Anyway, we continued the cruise and ended up back in Port Chicago in San Francisco Bay after eight weeks, and off-loaded the ship because it was going to go into dry-dock. Then we returned to school.

When I got back home I told my dad, none of my family had ever been in the military, but I told him. I said, "I don't know anything about the Marine Corps, but it's gotta be better than the Navy, 'cause I couldn't handle those ships and the way they live on them." My sophomore cruise was a combined amphibious training and aviation training down in Pensacola, Florida and in Little Creek, Virginia. Between my junior and senior year I met a young coed, a cute little gal by the name of Jean Highley and not too long after that we were engaged. That summer I went to Quantico, Virginia. It was sort of like a boot camp for fledgling second-lieutenants-to-be. And it was tough. I finished school and graduated and got commissioned on the 1st of August 1953 and then Jean and I went to Quantico, Virginia. We had been married the previous December. Quantico was where the officer's basic class was located. All second lieutenants go through there.

In the meantime we found out that my wife had become pregnant so we finished basic school and then I went to the armored school at Fort Knox, Kentucky for my basic armor training and our first child was born there, Cathy. She was born in the Army Hospital at Fort Knox. After that I was assigned to the Second Tank Battalion, Second Marine Division, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. We checked into housing down there and we had sort of humble housing in Jacksonville. This was way back in '54 so there wasn't much there at the time. I became a second lieutenant platoon leader. Charlie Company, Second Tank Battalion.

I went into tanks because the Marines had an order out that said that they wanted their junior officers who went into aviation to be, associated with the ground first. So you know what the ground guys were thinking, and I think it was probably a good idea. We had a lot of field exercises there. Our company went down to Vieques off the coast of Puerto Rico and we spent six weeks down there doing live gunnery and training. That was a good cruise; and we came back from that in the spring of '56.

Then we had a big Second Division, Second Air Wing exercise and the aggressors were Army troops from Fort Bragg. And one night I was sleeping in my sleeping bag on the top of the back of a tank ... very uncomfortable, and a flight of *ADs* came over and somebody said, "Those lucky guys are going out of here and they'll be back at Cherry Point in a little bit, and about an hour from now, they'll be at the bar." And I thought, "That sounds like a good life to me." So when I got back in from the exercise, I went into the adjutant and put my letter in to go to flight school. After about, oh, sixty or ninety days, I received word and I went to Cherry Point and took the aviation flight physical and was accepted and the next thing I knew, I had orders to attend flight school.

We went down and lived in a place called Navy Point which was right across from Main Side, Pensacola. I started out at Whiting Field and we were flying the SNJ which was called the AT6 by the Air Force, as our primary trainer. I went through the entire syllabus in the SNJ. We were the last class to do that and I was very happy that we did that. It was a good airplane. We did instruments and formation and gunnery, dive-bombing, and we were all carrier qualified. We had tail hooks on 'em, and then I landed on the *USS Saipan* which was CVL. And while we were at Pensacola, our second child, our oldest boy, Bruce was born in the Naval Hospital at Pensacola.

After I got my wings the colonel called us into the marine detachment there and said that they wanted some of us regular officers to go into a helicopter program because at the time the Marines' helicopters were pretty much populated by reservists and

the senior officers were all what we called "plowbacks" from fixed wing. We always said they were guys who couldn't hack it. They needed some young junior officers to start settin' up a career pattern in the helicopters. He said if we do that then after four years they will let us fly anything we'd want to. So I said, "O.K." And I never regretted it. I enjoyed helicopters very much and so that's why I stayed in them for my entire career.

After we got out of Ellison Field at Pensacola we got orders to go to New River Air Facility which is adjacent to Camp Lejeune. Jean wasn't excited about that because she didn't really like the area. Camp Lejeune was not a really neat place to be stationed. I joined my first squadron which was HMM 461 and it was a heavy helicopter squadron flying the Sikorski HR2S's. This was a single main rotor, twin engine, R2800 and a big single tail rotor. It was the biggest lifting helicopter at that time in the Defense Department. Later on the Army came out with one that could lift more than we did.

And that's when I started flying. It was a big, big helicopter compared to the ones we had in flight school. We did training all the time and we were gone constantly on deployments and everything else. One of the things I got involved in, which I liked, was the *Project Mercury*. *Project Mercury* was the original start of the astronauts and the idea was that they would drop this space capsule out of the back of C-130s. It was identical to the one that John Glenn first went up in and then it would come back at a certain time and a chute would deploy and then we would go out . . . it would deploy normally in the ocean . . . in the water, and then we would go out and pick it up with our helicopter. And we were flying out of Old NAS Chincoteague which is off of Wallops Island, Virginia and I did that, I guess, for about eight weeks and then they had enough information with what we were doing so the program ended. But that was pretty interesting. We got to see the space capsule but didn't get to meet any of the astronauts at that time. But we met a lot of people at Langley AFB and that was . . . the very early . . . the very first part of the U.S. Space Program.

And then eventually it was my time to go overseas. So I was transferred. In those days we had a unit rotation so I was transferred to an H34 squadron which was HMM-162. It was a primary troop transport in the Marine Corps. And we called it the HUS and then it was later designated the H34. So I trained with that and we went up into the mountains over the Smokies and we were mountain training up there. Eventually we all left as a squadron and made our way out to San Francisco and we joined up there. I left Jean and our three kids in Costa Mesa, California. Chris, our third child was born at New River. My reasoning was if I moved the family and the three kids out there, when I came back from overseas, they wouldn't even think about movin' me to the East Coast in order to save money.

So the guys all met in San Francisco and joined up there and we spent a couple, three days. Then we went out to Travis AFB on buses. They put us in a Super Constellation and off we went. It was a God-awful long ride in those days. It was ten

hours to Hawaii. Ten hours to Okinawa. And ten hours to Wake, too. We had to go to Wake so it was a long, long flight. And we got over there and we landed in Okinawa and went up to Marine Corps Air Station Futema which was being built up. It was an old Japanese fighter base at one time. The runway was still in pretty good shape, but everything else was bad. It had been bombed and pretty well beat up. The Seabees were building it as fast as they could so we could live there. We stayed down at Sukiran which was about five miles away until they got our quarters finished. But just about the time we got moved up to the hill, they had a crisis down in Laos and they put us on the *USS Hornet* which was an ASW helicopter carrier and they came in and we all flew out and landed on the *Hornet* and then we went down to Cubi Point which is in the Philippines. We off-loaded part of the Navy aircraft to give us more room to operate it and then we went over to the Gulf of Siam and did big circles over there for about four weeks. Then we came back to Cubi Point and then the strangest thing happened . . . some people in civilian clothes showed up and they wanted to interview a bunch of the pilots and they did. And then they took six of our airplanes and they stripped the bureau numbers off and all that stuff and painted them all white. We ended up finding out this was the first part of Air America and these pilots were required to resign their commissions. Their commissions were put in an envelope and sent to the Commandant of the Marine Corps where he held on to them with the idea that when this particular mission was finished, and they came back to the United States, they could regain their commissions in the Marine Corps. And they only took bachelors. Most of them were lieutenants and single crewmembers. So we took them over back to the Gulf of Siam and they flew off . . . off into the sunset and that was the last we saw of them. And I didn't see some of those guys for another, I don't know, seven or eight years. But amazingly so, the Marine Corps kept their promise. The ones that did want their commissions back, got 'em. And went on to a career in the Marine Corps.

So then we stayed on the *Hornet* for some time and then the *Hornet* was due to return to the United States so they brought out the *USS Thetis Bay* which was the original LPH, landing platform helicopter. It was an old jeep carrier from WW II. And we went on that. We cross decked at Cubi Point, flew from the *Hornet* to the *Thetis Bay*. And then we stayed on that for another seven months and then they were due to go back home and dawg-gone if they didn't move us from the *Thetis Bay* to the *Valley Forge*. So, out of our tour overseas, we were at sea about fourteen months out of the sixteen.

In those days, there were fifteen-month tours and we were the last squadron to go over fifteen months. When the squadron that came out to relieve us, we were all in the bar at Cubi Point one night and we're stayin' at the bar talkin'. One of the guys from the new squadron says, "Gee, that's too bad how you guys were screwed." And we said, "What are you talkin' about?" And they said, "Well, didn't you know? They cancelled all of your aircraft orders back to the States and you're going back via troop transport." As it turned out this Navy troop transport was going back home empty and somebody thought, "We can save a lot of money and just put them on this transport, and we won't have to pay for all those commercial plane rides." Well, they almost had the first riot in the Marine Corps Aviation because people were really upset about the way we were treated. But then not to tell us about it! They weren't going to tell us until we got up to Okinawa! Our fifteen-month tour turned into sixteen months.

So we did that and while I was overseas, several of us in the squadron had gotten a big packet of paperwork to fill out and they wanted to know all kinds of information . . . what kind of flight time you had and so on and so forth and many security checks. I dutifully filled all that out and sent it back. So when we arrived in San Diego on the *USS Paul Revere*, Jean met me down there and she had farmed the kids out so we had at least a couple of nights down in San Diego before we went back home. After we got settled down, she said, "What kind of a job is this that you're gonna have?" And I said, "Well, I'm not really sure." And she said, "Well, the Secret Service people have been all over the neighborhood asking questions of our neighbors and everything else about what kind of a woman I am and am I entertaining men? Are there liquor bottles in the trashcan and all that kind of stuff." They hadn't seen me 'cause I was just there for a few days before I left but they asked her all kinds of questions and they were all . . . the neighbors were all impressed.

So then we got orders to HMX1 which is the Marine Helicopter Squadron One and that's the squadron that flies the President. We bought a new car and went back to Quantico and joined HMX. Now this was in the summer of '61 and the change of command was just about completed; Eisenhower was gone and Kennedy was the new President and we were flying VH-3A helicopters which were Navy ASW helicopters. They took it all apart and gutted it and made it into a VIP configuration. And we had six of those airplanes and the Army had six because we shared the Presidential mission at that time. The idea was that if the President went to Europe, the Army would go. If the President went to the Pacific, and needed helicopters, we would go and then we would split the other CONUS tour equally. And I got checked out in the VH3A and it was normally a three-year tour. I got extended for a year. But it was tough. I was gone more than I was home. Jean raised the three kids for those four years 'cause I was never home. And if we weren't on a trip, we stood duty at Anacostia and that was for the White House evacuation mission. We would stay over there for three days. They had a bell where we lived, and when they rang the bell over at the White House, we had five minutes to get from there to land on the White House lawn and we never missed it. But there was a lot of scratchin' and hollerin' and everything else to get over there in time.

We had some nice trips. We went down to Caracas, Venezuela, a good trip, and then President Kennedy went to San Jose, Costa Rica and that was for the Organization of American States. My job at the time, all the four years I was in the squadron, was called the White House Liaison Officer. So when we were gettin' ready to go to a trip to a foreign country of some sort, I would go up and get briefed by the Naval Aide to where we were gonna go and everything, then I would go over to the State Department and find out what kind of currency we would need, what language they used and all that . . . and then I would go ahead of the President. and we'd scout out landing zones and places to park the airplanes and the gas . . . where were we gonna get the gas waitin' for the airplane there. So it was pretty busy, but very, very interesting and I got to meet a lot of good people.

One of the things I remember when we came out here to the West Coast, and we landed at Palm Springs, and this Air Force Aide was sort of . . . he was a Brigadier General. We always thought he was a little foppish. Anyway he told us while we were on Air Force One and he said, "Now everybody sit here 'cause I want you to meet somebody." So we said, "Yeah, yeah, right." So we're sittin' there and I had my back to the front of the airplane and the next thing I heard him say, "Now, so and so, this is Dinah Shore. So they got up to me and he says, "Captain Colbert, this is Dinah Shore." Lo and behold! It was Dinah Shore. So he brought her on board to meet all of us and everything, which was pretty neat.

And then we went up to Charlie Farrell's Racquet Club for lunch and from there we checked out the airfield and then the next day we went over to March Air Force Base because we were gonna operate out of March. I got rather preferential treatment at March because of an incident that had happened about six months prior to that. We were flying from Quantico to El Paso, Texas, Briggs Airfield, and we had to get there for a Presidential mission the next day. Now when we flew we always had a C-130 with us - spare engines and spare security people and all that business - and they would wait on the ground until the last helicopter got off. Nobody had any problems and then they would fly ahead to the next stop and have all the fuel trucks set up and lined up for us so we'd land and spend the minimum amount of time on the ground. So we're going into Carswell Air Force Base and taxied in and guess what? There are no fuel trucks! So our CO was a little upset about it and he went storming in there and asked our liaison guy where were the fuel trucks? And he said, "Sir. There's thunderstorms in the area and the Air Force won't refuel when there's thunderstorms in the area." So the Colonel went chargin' in the Base Ops and there was a Sergeant sittin' behind the desk, and our CO says, "Where's the Officer of the Day?" And the Officer of the Day showed up and he went through his whole litany, the Air Force Regulation . . . hope you understood that there are thunderstorms in the area and we can't refuel. So our Colonel said, "Where's the Commanding Officer of the Base?" And they said, "Well, he's in his quarters." He said, "Would you call him, please?" So he did and the captain explained to the colonel on the phone. So the captain handed the phone to our CO and said, "The colonel wants to talk to you." So they talked a few minute and the next thing you know, our colonel put the phone down, and said, "Your boss is on his way down here." So in just a few minutes this car comes screeching to a halt in front of the Base Ops and it's the Air Force Colonel. So they talk about it and he says, "You're not gonna get refueled," and so our CO said, "Do you have an Autovon Phone?" That was that military phone that went all over the world. The colonel said, "Yes." So our colonel picked up the phone and said, "I'd like to speak to the White House, please." And then he said, "I want General McHugh, the Air Force Aide to the President." And he says, "General, I'm down here at Carswell and we can't go any further because we can't get any fuel." So then he turned around to the Air Force Colonel and said, "General McHugh would like to talk to you." And the colonel started talking and you can see he's gettin' redder and redder in the face and finally he slammed the phone down and he said to the captain, "Refuel the bloody helicopters!" And that was the end of that.

Well then after that happened we came back through there about four days later and when we landed, the Base CO was out there, meeting us. And they brought

everything but the base band and it was a brand new colonel. The other colonel had been fired! The incident also caused an SOP on the Care and Feeding of Presidential Helicopters which eliminated a lot of problems. So when I landed at March that day after Palm Springs, the colonel met me out there. The general met me out there. I was embarrassed. I was a captain at the time and in civilian clothes and they treated me like royalty. And when I got inside they had the staff meeting. There was this roomful of colonels and the general's words were, "Whatever this captain wants, he gets." And that was a heavy load for me to have to carry. So anyway I had some good times on those.

One thing about President Kennedy . . . he knew how to live. 'Cause when we supported him, we used to summer on Cape Cod and we're flyin' out of Otis Air Force Base and then we wintered down in West Palm Beach. So it was pretty nice. And we were up in Cape Cod when their baby died and we flew some really bad, hairy missions. I was still a captain then. I remember he used to come up and he'd stick his head into the cockpit every now and then and pat us on the shoulder and say, "Nice job guys." You could imagine what that does to a Marine Captain when the President of the United States pats you on the back and says, "You did a nice job." You feel like you're two hundred feet tall. 'Cause it was pretty hairy flyin' up around Squaw Island and Buzzard's Bay because the fog would come in and it'd just get bad visibility.

And then we went down that fall to Texas and we operated out of Bergstrom Air Force Base which is a SAC Base there at Austin and we were down there for about five days and we're flyin' every day out to the L.B.J. Ranch and all around because when the Kennedys finished in Dallas, then they were gonna get on board *Air Force One* and fly down to Bergstrom. Then we were going to take the Kennedys and the Johnsons out to the Ranch, and they were going to spend the weekend out there. And we were in the BOQ, gettin' ready. We flew in Class A uniforms, not flight suits and we were sort of getting ready to change into our uniforms when the sergeant in charge of quarters came down and said, "Have you heard the radio?" And we said, "No." And they said, "Well, the President's been shot." So we turned the radio on and, of course, that's all we could get. Every radio station in the world was carryin' that. And it wasn't too long when they said, "The President's dead." Every place we went we had a white phone in our quarters, and when you picked up the phone, a guy would answer, "Yes, please." And that was a guy in the White House Communications Agency down in the basement of the White House. So the CO picked up and the essence of the call was, "What do you want us to do?" And they said, "Well, don't do anything right now. We don't know what the new President wants." And at the time there was a theory that there might be a conspiracy going on to kill the President and the Vice-President, all of the leaders, 'cause this was right in the middle of the Cold War. But eventually, not too long, maybe thirty minutes or less, they called up and said, "Return to Washington." So we got out of our Class A's and into our flight suits and packed our duffle bags together and went down to the Base Ops. When we got down there somebody said, "Look at the air field," and we looked around and the airfield was totally empty except for a *Gooney Bird*, a C47 and four Marine helicopters and our C130. Every B52 and KC135 was gone. That was pretty impressive. And that night we flew over Shreveport, Louisiana, to Barksdale Air Force Base which was also a SAC Base and that base was empty. We went to the Officers Club for dinner that night and we were the only guys in the entire O Club. Everybody else was just about gone.

So we made the transition and it was not an agreeable transition because the way the two Presidents operated was entirely different. It was a pleasure to serve with President Kennedy, but it was a real chore to serve with President Johnson. He was rude and crude and didn't treat his people very well. And we had also ... he wintered in Texas, summered in Texas and spent the fall in Texas. That was his entire world ... Texas.

There were a couple of interesting things and I remember one. We were at Atlanta, and President Johnson gave a talk down there to dedicate some dam. Then he wanted to go over to the Old Homestead which was about thirty miles away, in Georgia. I flew a recon flight over it and looked at it, and you could just barely see the outline of a building where the foundation used to be. So when we came back and we were sittin' in the helicopter and the crew chief said, "Holy cow! Here he comes!" Well, the President came on board and he wanted to use our bathroom. So the Secret Service guy comes up and said, "Who went over to see the Old Homestead?" So I said, "I did." And he said, "The President wants to talk to you." So I went back to talk to the President and the door's open and he's in there, sittin' on the can and he just asked me all about this thing and I'm thinkin', "Nobody'll ever believe what I'm doin' here and what I'm seein' here." And finally I said, "There's really nothing to see," and he said, "O.K. Just forget it. We won't do that."

We did a lot of flying around the LBJ land and that was pretty exciting too because out there in the hilly country there was a light here and then five miles away there'd be another light so you had almost invisible weapons out there. So we flew a lot of the time and just checked stuff and then we'd get up to Aunt Minnie's house, and Aunt Bertha's house and Uncle John's house because we'd be sittin' out there on the pad and all of a sudden the door would swing open there'd come one of the Secret Service guys runnin' out and he said, "He wants to go over and see Aunt Minnie." So we'd crank up and we'd take off. Now if the Secret Service guys had enough time to get there first, they'd get out there and drive into the yard of the farm house, and they'd put one of these rotating beacons on the top of their car so we had a fightin' chance to see where we were supposed to go. Otherwise, it was pretty hairy getting in and out of some of these places. I'm sure we killed a bunch of chickens and turkeys trying to fly low in some of these places.

The first time we went out there ... the very first time that we spent the night, we got out there and they said, "O.K. Are we free? Are we released to go back to Bergstrom?" The agent said, "Well, let me check." So he came back out in about fifteen minutes and said, "No, they want you to spend the night out here." And we said, "Ugh." We had nothin'. But they said, "Oh, we'll put you up over in the guesthouse." So we went over and they brought some food in or passed food in and the crew chief on the first night stayed on the airplane. And it was a nice guesthouse. They had a bedroom at each end and a sitting room in between and a big bathroom. So the next morning I got up and went in there and went to shave and I was in there shavin' and I caught out of the corner of my eye, the door on my left was openin' up to another bedroom and it was Dean Rusk. So then Dean Rusk came in and he and I stood side by side and didn't say a word but we shaved together. See, those are the little things that you remember that was pretty inane but once again, like I say, we were gone constantly. We were always on the move someplace and my wife hardly ever saw me. It was weird.

So after my four-year tour finally ended and because we had to have what was called a year's cooling off period. They wanted you to stay in country or out of combat for one year so that you could sort of forget what you saw and what you did and everything else around Camp David. We went up there and I got orders to enter this amphibious warfare school which is at Quantico and by this time now I'm a Major. And I had amphibious warfare school for six months and then I went to the development center for six months and then I got orders to go overseas to Vietnam. And by that time, this is the Fall of '66, and the war is heatin' up pretty good over there. And I had been flying both the CH46 and the Huey so I could be . . . hopefully I wanted to get into a VMO Squadron now in Vietnam.

So I went over eventually and the family stayed right there at Quantico. They had quarters. Jean was teaching school on the base so she was authorized quarters if they were available. That one really worked out well for us. So the kids stayed in the same school. She taught at the same school and we didn't have to move.

So I went overseas to *MAG16* down at Marble Mountain and I ran into an old nemesis and he said, "I'm gonna put you in CH46s in HMM-164," and I said, "Can't I get into VMO?" And he said, "No, we got too many guys in VMO." I said, "All right." So I went down and joined HMM-164. Now this was a squadron that had just about been in country about six months before, had come over as an entire squadron from Santa Ana so everybody knew everybody when I got in there. And I'd been in helicopters quite a few years but I didn't know a soul in that squadron. But eventually, they ended up assigning me as the Maintenance Officer. And not thirty days after that, who showed up but Ed Langley. Ed was a long, long time friend of mine. In fact, he taught me formation flying back in Saufley Field back in 1956 - '57. So he and I . . . I'd been there about I guess two months by this time. I was an old hand, but I remember he came to me the first week there and he said, "They want me to lead this flight, and I don't know where it is or anything else." I went into the Operation Desk and said, "You can't do this to him. He doesn't know where anything is." So I said, "I'll go ahead and lead the flight." And he said, "All right." Well, it's a good thing I did because it was south of Da Nang and it really turned into a bad scene. When we pulled in the Marines were all down in this rice paddy and they were raising up and firing over the top of the dikes and they jumped back down. Of course when we called them and said, "Is there anything going on down there?" They said, "Oh, no." Everything's real quiet. Well we could see that was a joke! They were fightin' down there for their lives!

So we pulled in there and started pullin' them out and we got stitched a couple of times with bullets. And I remember one horrible thing. This Marine was running towards us and just as he almost got to the helicopter and he got shot in the throat. And the blood went all over the front windshield. And he fell down and we dragged him inside the airplane and took him over to Charlie Med at Da Nang. But I'll never forget when we got back to Marble Mountain and shut down, Ed said, "Are they all like this?" and I said, "Nah. Thank Heavens they're not all like this. If they were, nobody'd be flyin' there."

And we did a lot of 46s which were the primary troop transport in Vietnam so we did a lot of infantry movements. We carried water, fuel, rations. One thing we did constantly it seemed like and nobody liked to do it, was reconnaissance inserts because we would pick a spot w-a-y back in country. W-a-y back behind the lines. And then we would go in there and we would drop 'em in and then we'd pull off a

couple of quicks, wait to see if they were O.K. and if we got an "all clear" which meant that there was no sign of immediate enemy, then we would fly back home. But in a lot of cases, that was not the case and we would be right back in tryin' to pull them out and gettin' shot up. Or they would be out there and the enemy would let 'em wait for a day or two and then they would hit 'em and then we'd have to go in at night or something like that to pull 'em out. And Emergency Recon Extract was a dirty word.

And during the day they always provided fixed wing escorts for us of some sort but at night it was, if we had anything it would be Huey gun ships so we would really be on our own. We preferred the A1s of the Air Force. They were called Sandys and that's the old AD Sky Raider and they started to fly them extensively in Korea ... near the end of Korea. And it was a big single engine aircraft that carried half the ordnance in the world and had the endurance of about four-and-a-half to five hours and we loved them because the jets would come in and put on a proper air show for us and they'd say, "Well, we're sort of ... we're bingo." We're gettin' low on fuel. We've gotta go back home and we always felt like just when we really needed them, they would leave us. So we were tickled to death when we'd see these A1s check in. They were really good to us. Particularly when we had to operate over in the Ashau Valley. There was another program they had over there they called the Road Runner and we would go up to Khe Sanh and they had a tent at the end of the runway and we'd go in there and get briefed and then there were these guys in Vietnamese and North Vietnamese uniforms. So we would take off and fly over to the Ashau Valley. Now the floor of the valley was about a thousand feet and we would go in there and the fixed wing would be with us but they'd be way back away from us. So as not to call attention. Of course we weren't foolin' anybody. But then we would go roarin' down into the valley, land these guys on the road that went down through the Ashau Valley and get outta there. And then the idea was that eventually they would ... when the units came down from North to go down to South Vietnam, they would infiltrate the NVA units and pick up information and all that kind of stuff. Some were far-fetched but that was the idea behind it.

Anyway we went over there we had Sandys supportin' us and one time I even had a B57 Canberra from Australia droppin' thousand pound bombs to help us. It was really the whole United Nations over there.

There were other things we did. We were up at Phu Bai ... I was one of three majors in the Squadron and the majors always had to lead the flights. So we would take turns flying from Phu Bai that's where we were stationed, and we'd go up to Dong Ha and spend three days there and then we'd go to Khe Sanh and spend three days there and then come back to Phu Bai. So it was just total rotation around all the time. Dong Ha was interesting in the fact that it was within range of the enemy artillery across the DMZ and they had a big logistic support area there. And they had it well-bunkered and all that kind of stuff but I remember many, many times we'd pull in there and we weren't in radio contact with anybody. And they would start loading us up with water, rations, and ammunition and all that kind of stuff and we always kept our eyes on the people that were doin' the loadin', the grunts outside the airplane. You'd see them all of a sudden drop everything and run like hell to a bunker and we knew that in coming was on the way so we'd close the hatch and get outta there as fast as we could. Never lost any airplanes in the Load Zone but it sure got exciting sometimes. Interestingly enough they never destroyed that. They mortared them a lot, but it never got destroyed.

Then there was another place we used to go to. It was called Contien Giolin and these were outposts about half-way between Dong Ha and the DMZ and they were manned by Marines and we'd have to go up there and bring food and water to them and ammo and then take their wounded out. And when we first started doin' it, we were goin' up real high and then corkscrew down to the place. But then after a while that got to be very hazardous because by the time you got down on the ground, they had everything zeroed in and the mortar rounds were falling on our LZ before they even got on the ground.

So then we started ... we'd put a plane up high and we would fly right over the top of the nap as fast as we could go and go skidding in there, land, load and get out. And we'd get directions if we were moving the wrong way or anything from the guy up above. And that seemed to work O.K. But after a while they all did catch onto what we were doin'. Unfortunately they had a lot of our radios and they had a lot of mixed people ... the Viet Congs and the North Vietnamese could speak English and they knew our call signs and everything else. So they weren't the dumbest enemy in the world.

So eventually that was about the extent of ... I spent the entire thirteen months in the Squadron and there were times that I would have taken the job as a Wing Postal Officer to get out of the cockpit 'cause I was really gettin' tired. We took a lot of casualties in our Squadron. We had almost a dozen killed and a lot of us were wounded. In fact one night outside of Khe Sanh, I was up there with a flight of four and we came in about 2 o'clock and at about noon that day the guys that were there before us had inserted a recon team Northwest of KheSanh almost over on the Laotian border. And so I checked with one of the guys there and checked him where it was and they showed me where they put it in and everything else so we said, "O.K." And there hadn't been a sound from 'em all the time they were there. So we flew a few resupply missions and then got to bed. At about 4 o'clock in the morning this guy comes in and wakes me up and says, "The Colonel wants to see you in the CP," and I go over and this recon team has been just about eliminated. Half of them are dead and the other half are wounded and they're surrounded and we have to get 'em out. So I said, "Well, what've I got for support as far as gun ships goes and all they had for me was a Huey. One Huey with side firing guns because its forward guns weren't shooting." So I said, "Oh, hell. O.K." So out we went and I had my wing man with me and I told my wing man when we located pretty much where the guy was, and I said, "You stay up high and I'm gonna go down there and pick 'em up." Well, I got down and I rocked over to set her down and the whole world erupted! And we took over forty-seven bullet holes in the cockpit and I was wounded in my right leg. The co-pilot had part of his right foot shot away. The crew chief got wounded in the arm and the gunner got wounded in the buttocks. And I lost almost every system I had so I was just able to get back to KheSanh So we got the co-pilot and the crew chief and the gunner and got them taken care of. They went down to the medical guys. So then I went down to the colonel and he said, "You gotta try one more time," and I said, "Well, we're almost out of pilots and airplanes," and he said, "Well, you've gotta try." So I said, "O.K." And so this pilot that was gonna lead this thing was Captain Paul Looney and his nickname was PT and I said, "PT, watch it out there because what they're gonna do is let you get down right almost to a hover and that's when they open up." You wouldn't know there was anybody there until right when you're almost on the ground. So they went out and sure enough, that's exactly what the Vietcong did. PT got down and he rolled over and he got blasted again and we used to have these chest protectors ... we called them "bullet bouncers" and the bullet went right above it, into his throat. So he got out of the cockpit, into the back

... I guess he was just lookin' for help ... and the co-pilot took control of the airplane and flew it back to Khe Sanh. The gunner, the first mechanic had a huge bullet ... it went right through his wrist and almost lost his hand and the gunner had been wounded in the buttocks. Anyway when they got him back down there but he never made it to Charlie Med because he bled to death before they could get him in there.

So now we're down ... we got two pilots wounded and four crewmen wounded and we're all outta airplanes. So the colonel said, "O.K." And the next morning they came out there and they must have had half of the First Marine Air Wing fixed wing support out there. And they went in to get this guy and got him out and he ended up gettin' the Silver Star. And I met him over at Pearl Harbor. A really neat guy. And he was there the whole nightlong but they did not ... they could've killed him anytime because they were all badly wounded. But they kept them alive because they figured as long as they had live Marines here, we'd keep bringin' these helicopters in to try and get 'em out. But they'd rather shoot down a helicopter than one corporal. So, that was another interesting night. And typical of the things we had to deal with over there.

So, eventually, the tour came to an end. When I left the United States, I had departed on the 11th of December so of course I spent my first Christmas and New Years in Vietnam and then we came back around a year in December and the Wing came out with an order that said, "Anybody that came in country before the 10th of December could go home early." Well guess what? I missed it by one day so I got to spend my second Christmas and my second New Years in Vietnam, which was not a good thing to do.

And I came back to Quantico and picked up Jean and the kids and this time ... it was a delight because I had received orders to Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii and I'd been puttin' in for duty in Hawaii since I was a second lieutenant and, in fact, I'd quit after about five years 'cause I thought there's no way I'm ever gonna get there. And lo and behold! I did! And that was especially exciting for my wife, Jean, because, as a young high school girl, she had been stationed near Hickam with her dad and she ended up graduating from Roosevelt High School and then she went a year at the University of Hawaii. So this was like old home week for her.

So eventually we flew out of Travis and got out there and we had to buy an old car and ended up getting a set of quarters. It was absolutely gorgeous! We were right on the water. Right on the ocean. If that house were a commercial house it would cost three million dollars probably. And it was a good duty station because I reported in there and they had a brigade there but it was a brigade in name only. They had one squadron of F8 Crusaders and they had like a reinforced company of Marines and that was the extent of the brigade. But then they started building the thing up and they brought the flag from MAG24, Marine Air Group 24 in there and they brought a colonel over from FMF PAC to be the CO and they picked me as the Executive Officer. I was a major then so that was a pretty good deal. And I got the thrill of watching this Group and Brigade grow and build and eventually we ended up with three F4 squadrons, two F4J and one F4B squadron and we had a heavy detachment of CH46s, a Battalion Landing Team and with all of its supporting arms.

So we ended up being a pretty formidable force and we supported those guys with our helicopters and the F4s did their thing and got a lot of good flyin' around Hawaii. One thing I used to love to do is I'd go over to the other side, over the Pearl Harbor

side, and shoot touch-and-go's at Ford Island 'cause that was always a thrill for me to watch where the bombing of Pearl Harbor took place, right around there. Every time you took off you could look right down and see the *USS Arizona* sittin' there on the bottom ... on the mud at the bottom.

And we flew over the other Islands and there was one thing ... we had an Island called Kawolauri and that was where the Navy came out on their Operational Readiness Inspections. They'd bring their ships out and they would test their guns and fire their guns and they would be graded to see if they were combat-ready. And our job was to fly the air and naval gunfire teams in there to call in the air and supports. So we would fly them out there and fly them back and that was pretty interesting.

And we had one bad scene there and I think that's what helped me get my first Squadron. I was ... by that time I was the Assistant S3. Somebody told me that the Constellation had just had a terrible accident on the flight deck. So I called over to FMF PAC and they verified. So I called down to our helicopter guys and said, "Get all the airplanes we have. Get them out and ready to go and find aircrews for all of 'em 'cause they are going to need us." And they did. They called over and in about twenty minutes and we launched two airplanes almost immediately. And they were quite impressed with the Marines. We helped them out. And I got a nice pat on the back from the Admiral over there and everybody else. And I don't know about a month after that the Colonel came down and said, "Bruce, I'm gonna give you a Squadron." So he did. He gave me my first Squadron, a Marine Air Base Squadron. It was a mixed bag. I had motor transport and medical and dental and I had all the cooks and bakers and everything. And I had the GCA guys ... the Air Traffic Control people. So it was an interesting assignment. And no airplanes, but, very interesting. We supported the group, you know, we had the fuel and lubricant guys. We ran all the tactical airfield dispensing systems for the field and we had the crash crews with us. So we did everything on the Air Base.

So we were three-and-a-half years at Kaneohe Bay. Hated to leave! I thought Jean and the kids were going to stay there. Our oldest boy turned into a surfing bum and almost surfed himself out of high school. So it was time we had to come home.

Then I had orders back to Quantico. Well, originally they said, "You're gonna go to Headquarters Marine Corps." So we came back to Quantico and I bought a house up in a place called Lake Ridge which was brand new. And we went down to the Officer's Club one day to the pool and Ed Langley was there and he said, "When are you gonna check in? They really need you at the Air Station." And I said, "Hell, Ed. I got orders to Headquarters Marine Corps," and he said, "Nah. They changed that. You'd better call your Monitor." So I did and they said, "Yeah. We forgot to tell you. You're going to go to Quantico to the Air Station." And I did and I ended up being the S3 of the Air Station. And that was interesting. I really got to fly a lot. They had T28s there so we flew T28s a lot. They were just an average tour. And after eighteen months it was time to go back overseas.

But this time we had this house that we were livin' in so we just left the kids right there when Jean was teachin' school there. And I went over then and checked into MAG36 and Bill Maloney who had been with me in HMX was the group Commander and he said, "I want to give you HMM165 but you're going to have to go to the wing to meet the general 'cause he approves all Squadron Commanders." So I went up

and met General Brown and we talked and talked and he said, "O.K. You got it." And I went back to Okinawa and eventually they sent me down to Cubi Point. The Squadron was on the *USS Tripoli* which was an LPH and they were just back for refit from Operation In-Sweep. Operation In-Sweep was the sweeping of mines from North Vietnamese harbors. Part of the Paris Peace Talks that Kissinger set up and was that they would release U.S. prisoner's of war, the pilots that were captured up there, if we agreed to sweep all of the mines that we had dropped in Vinh and Haiphong Harbors.

I was Squadron Commanding Officer and we had ten CH-46s and six CH-53s and then we had four Cobras, gun ships so we had a real mixed bag. The change of command was at Subic Bay on the hangar deck of the *USS Tripoli* which was an LPH, and then the next day we set sail for the Gulf of Haiphong. We went up on Operation In-sweep, which was a deal where the U.S. government agreed to sweep all of the mines that we had planted in Vinh and Haiphong harbors and that was part of the deal to our POWs back out of North Vietnam. Now by that time our POWs were home but we still owed that commitment. So we'd go up there and each helicopter had a recording device that showed exactly what your track was. And when we'd go in the morning, they would come out there and load this cartridge or whatever the hell it was into this machine and then that machine told you where to fly and we did racetrack patterns. And we had to be very careful because their ZU-37s was radar and had us constantly on their scope while their shore batteries tracked us so if you went ashore they were gonna shoot you down. So we had to be very, very careful about that.

So they had been up there doing part of that and they had to come out and refit and get things ready to go and then go back. So we had the change of command on the Hangar Deck of the *USS Tripoli* and then within two days or so we were at sea. And the assignment was outstanding 'cause I had a captive squadron. I got to meet everybody and there were a couple of guys in the squadron that I had known before and I had a really good bunch of guys. Good pilots and good officers. So that helped make my job a lot easier.

And we would go up to Haiphong Harbor and sit out, oh, about five miles out, and we would schedule missions to go in and sweep the harbor with our helicopters. This was Airborne Encounter Mine Majors. And we had a device there ... a helicopter that tracked the exact route where we were flyin' and it would be printed onto a form and when we'd come back at night to the ship, we would turn that thing, come right on the ship and take it right off and take it downstairs and then they would analyze it. And then that way they could plan the next day's missions. Some places that we missed or places that we still had to get. And then about every third day we would fly in our 46s. We had two of them and go in and pick up half a dozen North Vietnamese officials and we did that in Haiphong Airport and bring 'em out to the ship and then they would sit down with our Navy counterpart and look at the maps and make sure that we were in fact doing what we said we were gonna do and that we were in fact sweeping the harbor.

And it was interesting. We had very narrow windows to go in and out of Haiphong because we had a device on the cockpit that told you when you were being under the radar of the C23 and they tracked us all the way in and all the way out. So we had no deviations 'cause we'd been told, "If you deviate at all, you're dead. They're gonna blow you right out of the sky."

And then we'd come back that night and they would take the cartridge out and take it down in the CIC and read the results and then that's how they planned where you were supposed to fly the next day. And then every third day we would fly into Haiphong Airport and pick up about half a dozen Vietnamese officials, fly them up to the ship and then they would come on board and they'd go down and they'd review all these tapes. Anyway we were up in Haiphong Harbor and the Vietnamese would come out to the ship and they would study all the charts and everything from the last three days and then sometimes they'd say, "You gotta do this better ... or ... do that better." And then we'd fly back into the airport but a couple of times we got into the city of Haiphong and there were entire blocks of the city that were gone. They'd reduced it to rubble. And we all could tell that's when the B-52s were doing their thing and they really were doin' a number on them. Unfortunately they stopped that bombing. I think we were really hurtin' them. And that's what caused them to go back to the Peace Table in Paris.

So we did that and we found one mine, a visual aircraft dropped a mine and most of them were aviation-type bombs with special fuses on 'em and we had one sled we towed that was like a high speed prop and it would duplicate the propellers of ships because these weapons were set to go off from the third ship that went over it, and, it would explode. And these were from the magnetic field as well as the sound of the propellers and then we had another thing like a long telephone pole. That was called a magnetic orange pipe and we called them MOPS and we towed those and those were strictly magnetic fields that bring the mines up. And all that time up there we exploded one mine. And the Americans had told them that a lot of them were gonna deactivate themselves or would self-explode after a certain period of time. But the Vietnamese wouldn't buy that so that's why we had to go up there and do all that.

And then we went down to Vinh Harbor which was South of Haiphong along the coast and we swept down there for about three weeks and it was very coincidental because we finished with the sweeping about the same time a huge typhoon was coming in. And so we battened everything down and made for the open sea. I didn't say it, but this was the largest Navy Task Force since Task Force 38 in WW II. We had two CVAs as protection for us. There were a lot of ships. Anyway, off we went and we knew the winds were gonna be pretty ferocious and I made the decision after talkin' with my guys, that we were going to take all the blades off the helicopters and put them inside the helicopter. The Navy Squadron on the other ship opted not to do that. They didn't think they had to. Well, the next day after the storm passed I was ready to fly by noon and they weren't ready to fly for another month or so 'cause they'd lost about half their blades. They really had a lot of damage. So we came out lookin' pretty good on that thing.

So we went down to Subic Bay and had a couple of big parties and the Admiral was there and told everybody what a good job they did in End Sweep and so eventually the Task Force starts breaking up and now I've got my wife, Jean, coming out to Manila International Airport and I'm going to pick her up and she and I are going to go to Hong Kong. Well, about three days after we break up Operation In-Sweep, they put us on alert for Operation Eagle Pull. Eagle Pull was the evacuation of the American Embassy at Saigon and Phnom Penh, Cambodia. So I said, "Oh, hold the fort!" So I asked my XO, Buck Rogers, I said. "Go down and tell that Navy ... ask the Navy to send a message to her that ... Don't come ... and I'll tell her why later." So they did and she was able to get the tickets cancelled and we didn't lose any money or anything. But that was very close.

So then off we went to the Gulf of Siam ... actually Nakhon Phanom, the Gulf of Thailand now. And we flew into Phnom Penh for site survey for evacuation. And eventually it was my turn to come home and they decided to send our squadron ashore and replace us with another squadron. And it was a CH-53 Squadron 'cause they can carry more people, and it had better range and that would be better suited for the evacuation mission. So we went back to Okinawa and were replaced by a 53 Squadron and then eventually, not too far along, 'cause after that I had a change of command and this old friend of mine, Joe James. He was a major and he was able to get the squadron. And I came home and this time I had orders to the Naval Air Systems Command in Washington. And I was going to be in OP 04 which was aviation logistics. We had a rear admiral in charge of us. And we were stationed out at 5600 Columbia Pike for a while. Then we went down to Crystal City and I was in that for about a year-and-a-half or two years workin' on logistic matters for the Navy and Marine Corps. And then I got promoted to colonel and went down to OP NAV in the Pentagon and that would be the Department of the Navy Program Information Center. I worked down there for a couple of years working on Navy programs. And then because of my promotion to Colonel, I ended up going to Headquarters Marine Corps and I went to work in the Requirements and Programs Branch. My general was Major General E. J. Bronars and it was a very interesting two years there because we got involved in all the programs for the Marine Corps. And this is mostly ground because the aviator programs went to the Navy, but all the ground programs stayed with the Marine Corps. So, it was an interesting period.

And then, lo and behold, I got orders to the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, something I'd been wanting for a long time so it was really a nice little pat on the head to get that. It was over at the Fort Leslie J. McNair which is right there in Washington, right around the tidal basin. That's the only place I ever liked to run because it's just beautiful running around that base. And that was a nice full year and we got to go on a lot of good fact-finding trips. And we went out and visited the Maritime Fleets, the National Mothball Fleets both in New York and out in San Francisco. We got to the Bath Iron Works up in Maine. We went to New York City several times and talked to the shipbuilding people and everything. And it was really interesting and everybody had a good time. You had exams but they weren't critical. I mean, nobody had to make A's on all of them. Some people tried, but it was a nice, enjoyable twelve months.

And then right before school was gettin' out, I got a call from Brig. Gen. Greg Corliss who was the Assistant Wing Commander out at Third Marine Air Wing at El Toro and he said, "General Maloney wants you to come out and take over MAG 16." And I said, "Gee, that's great. I'd love it." So they said, "O.K. I'll tell the general." So then, about three or four days later, I get a call from the Detail Section, the Colonel's Detail Section over at Headquarters and they said, "Hey! We got an opening for the Marine Liaison to the Commander-in-Chief Navy Forces. Europe and that job would be in London." And I thought, "Oh, man." So I didn't tell Jean. I called Brig. Gen. Tom Morgan out in Korea. He was out there. He was a brigadier then and I said, "Tom? What should I do?" And he said, "Take the command." So I said, "O.K." So then I came home. I called Greg back and I said, "All right. I want MAG 16." Then I went home and told Jean. Well, she wasn't all that excited or happy about it, but she understood. She was a good Marine wife.

So I came out and took over MAG16 at Tustin. They had a change of command there, and it was a big air group. We had over 5,000 people in the air group. And I

had six or seven squadrons and the big thing we were doin' then, we were rotating squadrons back and forth overseas so it was a constant mish-mashing of people and planes and everything trying to get one squadron ready to go and staying down and one had just come back. So it kept us all busy. We had base quarters in El Toro and then while I had the group I came up for promotion to general and I didn't make general. So then General Maloney was gettin' ready to leave and he said, "I want you to come over and be Chief of Staff at Third Wing." By that time I knew that General LeBlanc, our next-door neighbor from Hawaii, was comin' out to take over the Wing so I said, "O.K., if it's O.K. with him. Fine." So I went over and I took over as Chief of Staff of the Third Wing. The good thing about it was I got to fly quite a bit. Fly a lot. And so in fact I got to fly the day before retiring. And I had been talkin' to an old friend of mine about coming to work for him. He had a small company out in Riverside. So I said, "O.K. I'll do that," 'cause I didn't have any idea what I wanted to do when I retired from the Marine Corps and I was ill prepared for almost anything. I could command a lot of people and do a good job but they don't have many jobs for commanders in the civilian world.

So, anyway, I retired on the first of August 1980 and moved out to Riverside and we've been out here ever since. We've gotten involved in quite a few activities and we thoroughly enjoy our retirement years out here in Riverside. So I ended up servin' 27 years to the day. I ended up with about 9,000 hours of flight time and I retired as a full colonel in the Marine Corps, which we think is equivalent to about a Two Star General in the Air Force or at least an Admiral in the Navy. And that's all.